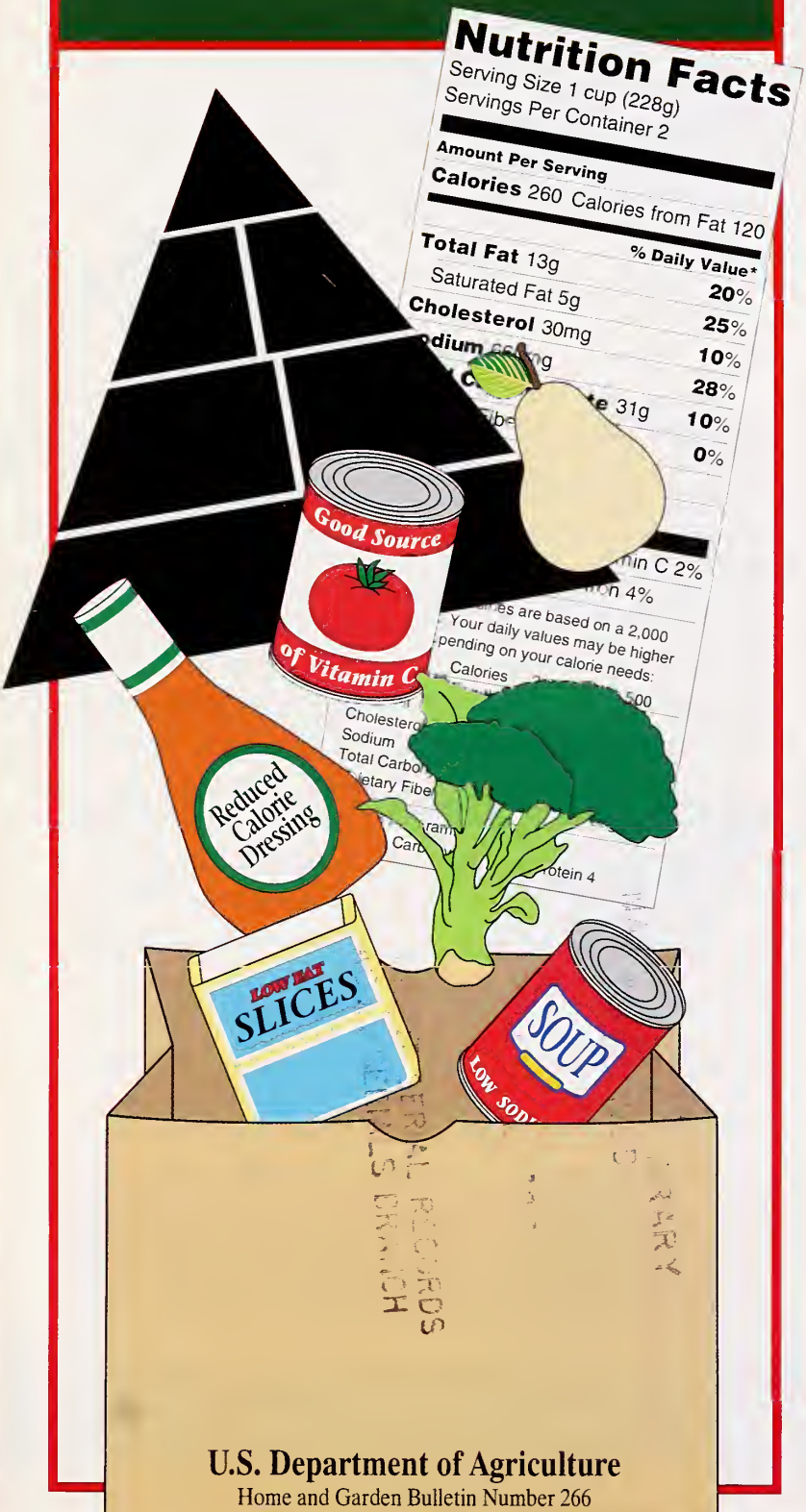
Check It Out!

The Food Label The Pyramid And You



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Home and Garden Bulletin Number 266

Check it Out... The Food Label, the Pyramid, and You

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have revamped food labels to make planning a healthy diet easier for you and your family. By law, most foods are required to display a **Nutrition Facts** panel. The law also requires that label claims such as "lite," "low fat," and "high in fiber" not be just advertising hype—that they actually be true.

The Food Guide Pyramid was developed to help you make healthy food choices. The Pyramid is an outline of what to eat each day. It helps you follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans—seven basic principles representing the best, most current advice from health and nutrition experts.

Together, the new food label and the Food Guide Pyramid are powerful tools for building a healthy diet. This brochure will help you use these tools while you're at the grocery store.

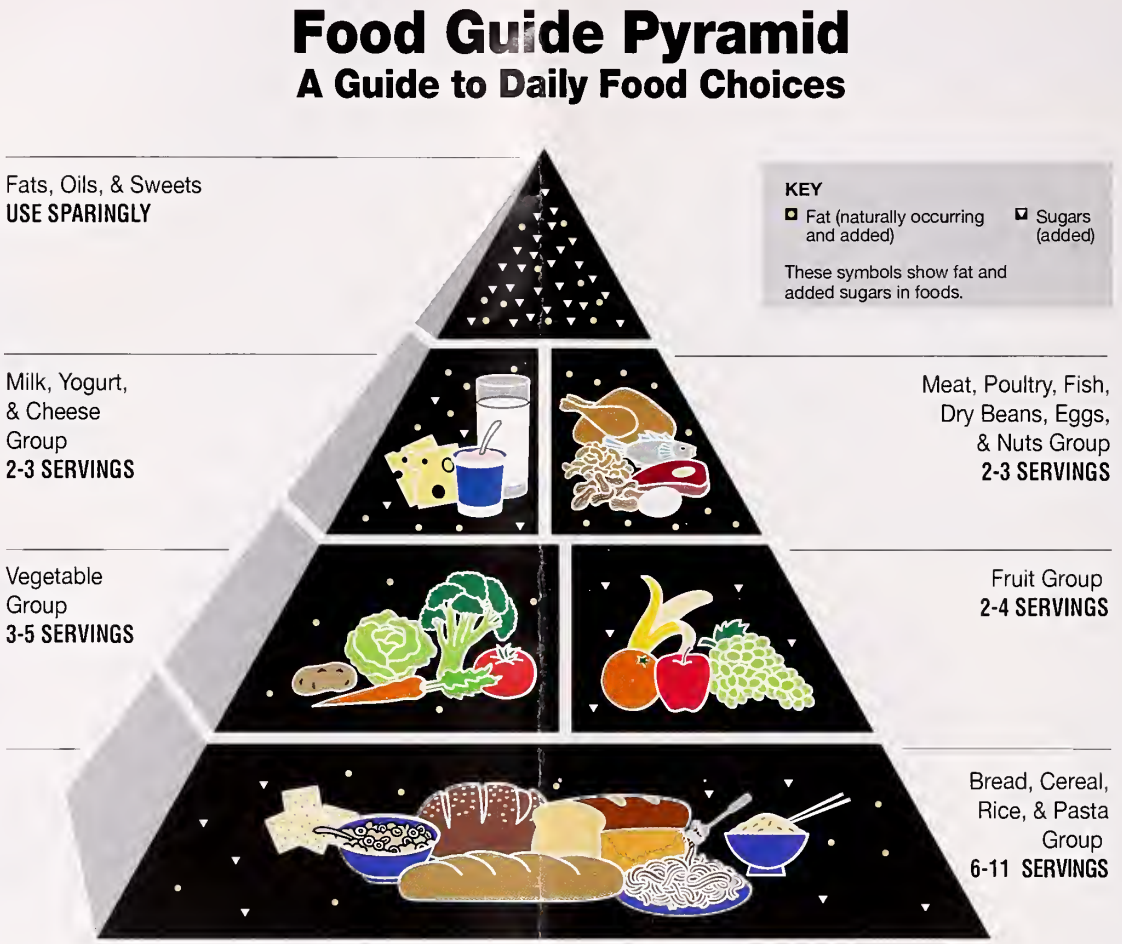
What Does Healthy Eating Mean?

Healthy eating means following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans—advice for healthy Americans 2 or more years of age. Nutrition experts agree that following these seven principles will help you enjoy better health and reduce your chances of getting certain diseases, such as heart disease and some forms of cancer.

The Guidelines are:

- Eat a variety of foods
- Maintain healthy weight
- Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol
- Choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and grain products
- Use sugars only in moderation
- Use salt and sodium only in moderation
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation

Use These Tools To Build a Healthy Diet



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The Food Guide Pyramid helps you put the Dietary Guidelines into action. The Pyramid shows you the food groups and the number of servings from each group to eat each day. The number of servings that's right for you depends on how many calories you need. That depends on your age, sex, size, and how active you are. To get needed nutrients, almost everyone should have at least the lowest number of servings recommended.

Within the five major food groups below the Pyramid tip, try to choose foods that are lower in fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, added sugars, and sodium. Go easy on foods at the tip of the Pyramid—the fats, oils, and sweets group. These are foods such as salad dressings, oil, cream, butter, margarine, sugars, soda, candy, and sweet desserts. These foods add calories but few nutrients.

Whether a specific food fits into your diet depends on what other foods you eat during the day. Remember, it's your *total* diet that counts. If some of your choices during the day are relatively high in fat, cholesterol, sugars, and sodium (for example, a rich dessert for dinner or a salty snack), try to choose foods that are lower in fat, cholesterol, sugars, and sodium the rest of the day.

Let the Label Work for You

The new food label can help you compare foods within Pyramid food groups and help you decide which to choose. On the label front you might find some terms defined by the Government that can be used to describe a food's nutrient content. These are *free, low, lean, extra lean, high, good source, reduced, fewer, less, light,* and *more.*

For the first time, foods that meet certain standards will be allowed to carry health claims about the link between certain foods or nutrients and specific diseases. For example, the label of a food that is low in fat may carry a claim about the relationship of a low-fat diet to reduced risk of cancer. Meat and poultry products have not yet been approved to carry such claims, but may do so in the future.

The food package provides a **Nutrition Facts** panel that contains information that will help you fit the food into your overall daily diet. Nutrition Facts must tell you how much saturated fat, cholesterol, fiber, and certain nutrients are contained in each serving. Serving sizes must now be based on standards set for similar kinds of food. That makes it easier to compare the nutritional value of similar products.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container 2

Amount Per Serving

Calories 260 Calories from Fat 120

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 13g	**20%**
Saturated Fat 5g	**25%**
Cholesterol 30mg	**10%**
Sodium 660mg	**28%**
Total Carbohydrate 31g	**10%**
Dietary Fiber 0g	**0%**
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	

Vitamin A 4% • Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 15% • Iron 4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	100	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

%Daily Value (DV) shows how a food fits into your overall daily diet. Higher percentages mean greater amounts of nutrients.

Whether or not the food fits into your diet depends on what other foods you eat. For most people, the goal is to choose foods that add up to about 100% of the Daily Value for total carbohydrate, dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

Daily Values that have been set for certain nutrients are listed on larger packages for both a **2,000- and a 2,500-calorie diet.** (A 2,000-calorie diet is about right for many women, teenage girls, and less active men. A 2,500-calorie diet is about right for many men, teenage boys, and very active women.)

INGREDIENTS: BLEACHED FLOUR, SUGAR, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED VEGETABLE SHORTENING, FRUCTOSE, WATER, CORN SYRUP, COCOA, WHEY BLEND, CORN STARCH, SALT, SODIUM BICARBONATE, LECITHIN, ARTIFICIAL FLAVORINGS, AND ARTIFICIAL COLORS.

A **list of ingredients** is now required on almost all foods, even standardized ones such as mayonnaise and bread. Ingredients are listed from most to least by weight. If you have food allergies, the ingredient list can help you identify products that might pose a problem for you.

Action, Action . .

Eat a Variety of Foods

Keep the Food Guide Pyramid in mind when you choose foods. Almost everyone needs at least the minimum number of servings from each of the five major food groups.

Look for the products with the words ***good source*** or ***high*** used to describe the vitamin, mineral, or fiber content per serving. Foods labeled ***good source*** must contain 10%-19% of the Daily Value for the nutrient per standard serving. Foods labeled ***high*** must contain at least 20% of the Daily Value per standard serving.

Check labels for a claim about diet and osteoporosis to find foods that are good sources of calcium.

Be on the lookout for nutrition information that is on display in many stores for the most popular *fresh* vegetables and fruits and meats, poultry, and seafood.

Total Carbohydrate 31g	**10%**
Dietary Fiber 0g	**0%**
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	

Remember, you don't have to pick foods that contain 100% of the Daily Value for vitamins and minerals to get

Maintain Healthy Weight

The Food Guide Pyramid recommends choosing foods lower in fats and added sugars most of the time. Remember that fats and added sugars add calories, but few nutrients, to foods.

Check the label for claims such as ***low, reduced, light,*** or ***less*** that describe the calorie content per serving. Read the fine print next to the claim. For example, a reduced-calorie salad dressing label might tell you that regular salad dressing contains 140 calories per 2-tablespoon serving, while the reduced-calorie version contains 105 calories per serving.

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container 2

Amount Per Serving

Calories 260	Calories from Fat 120
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 13g	**20%**
Saturated Fat 5g	**25%**

Compare the amount you usually eat to the serving size shown on the label. If the labeled serving size is 1/2 cup and you eat 1 cup, you have to double the amount of calories and other nutrients listed.

Use Salt and Sodium Only in Moderation

The Food Guide Pyramid recommends making lower sodium choices from all food groups most of the

Action, Action . . . Read the Food Label

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Be on the lookout for nutrition information that is on display in many stores for the most popular *fresh* vegetables and fruits and meats, poultry, and seafood.

Total Carbohydrate 31g		10%
Dietary Fiber 0g		0%
Sugars 5g		
Protein 5g		
Vitamin A 4%	•	Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 15%	•	Iron 4%

Remember, you don't have to pick foods that contain 100% of the Daily Value for vitamins and minerals to get the amounts you need. All the foods you eat add up to your total for the day.

Use Sugars Only in Moderation

The Food Guide Pyramid recommends limiting foods at the Pyramid tip and choosing foods lower in added sugars from the other food groups most of the time. This advice is most important for people who have lower calorie needs.

Look for words like ***free*** or ***reduced*** to describe the amount of sugars in a serving of a food.

Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	

Check Nutrition Facts for the amount of sugars (in grams) in one serving of the food. This number includes both added sugars and those naturally present. Foods with natural sugars, such as milk and fruit, are also good sources of other nutrients like vitamins and minerals.

INGREDIENTS: BLEACHED FLOUR, SUGAR, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED VEGETABLE SHORTENING, FRUCTOSE, WATER, CORN SYRUP, COCOA WHEY BLEND, CORN STARCH, SALT, SODIUM BICARBONATE, LECITHIN, ARTIFICIAL FLAVORINGS, AND ARTIFICIAL COLORS

Look for terms such as ***sugar (sucrose), fructose, maltose, lactose, honey, syrup, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup,*** molasses, or ***fruit juice concentrate*** in the ingredient list. If one of these terms appears first, or if several are listed, the food is likely to be high in added sugars.

Maintain Healthy Weight

The Food Guide Pyramid recommends choosing foods lower in fats and added sugars most of the time. Remember that fats and added sugars add calories, but few nutrients, to foods.

Check the label for claims such as ***low, reduced, light,*** or ***less*** that describe the calorie content per serving. Read the fine print next to the claim. For example, a reduced-calorie salad dressing label might tell you that regular salad dressing contains 140 calories per 2-tablespoon serving, while the reduced-calorie version contains 105 calories per serving.

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
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Amount Per Serving	
Calories 260	Calories from Fat 120
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%

Compare the amount you usually eat to the serving size shown on the label. If the labeled serving size is 1/2 cup and you eat 1 cup, you have to double the amount of calories and other nutrients listed.

Use Salt and Sodium Only in Moderation

The Food Guide Pyramid recommends making lower sodium choices from all food groups most of the time.

Health experts recommend that sodium intake not be more than 2,400-3,000 milligrams (mg) a day. One level teaspoon of salt contains about 2,300 mg of sodium.

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 660mg	28%

The %Daily Value tells you whether the food is higher or lower in sodium. For example, a product with 5%DV per standard serving is low in sodium. A product with 40%DV in a serving is relatively high in sodium. Try to limit your total sodium consumption to 100% or less of the Daily Value.

Look for products where the words ***free, low,*** or ***reduced*** are used to describe the sodium content of the food.

Check labels for health claims about diet and high blood pressure to find foods that are low in sodium.

Choose a Diet Low in Fat, Saturated Fat, and Cholesterol

The Food Pyramid recommends limiting foods in the Pyramid tip and making choices within the other food groups that are lower in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. The label shows you how fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol in packaged foods add up, so you can keep your intake under 100% of the Daily Values.

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Cholesterol 30mg	10%

Look for the words ***free, low, light*** or ***reduced*** to describe the fat, saturated fat, or cholesterol content in a food. If a food has a ***low cholesterol*** claim, it must also be limited in saturated fat.

Check labels for health claims to quickly find products that are low in fat, saturated fat, or cholesterol:

—If the label has a claim about the relationship of saturated fat and cholesterol in the diet to heart disease, the food *must* be low in fat, saturated fat, *and* cholesterol.

—If the label has a claim about fat and cancer, the food *must* be low in fat.

Choose ***lean*** and ***extra lean*** meat, poultry, and seafood. Top round beef, pork tenderloin, and salmon are examples of products that can use the ***lean*** claim. Ocean perch, haddock, or skinless chicken are examples of ***extra lean*** products.

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 660mg	28%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	

Look at the %Daily Value (%DV) to see how a food fits into your daily diet. A food that has 3 grams of fat in a serving gives you 5%DV (that is, it's low in fat). A food that contains 32 grams of fat in a serving gives you almost 50%DV—it's high in fat.

If You Drink Alcoholic Beverages, Do So in Moderation

The Food Guide Pyramid recommends that alcoholic beverages be consumed in moderation, if at all. Adults who choose to drink should have no more than one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men. Like other foods in the Pyramid tip, alcoholic beverages provide calories but little else nutritionally.

Count as a drink: A 12-fluid ounce (fl. oz.) serving of beer, a 5 fl. oz. serving of wine, or a 1-1/2 fl. oz. serving of liquor.

Beer labeled ***light*** contains fewer calories than the same brand of regular beer, but just as much alcohol. Wine labeled ***light*** contains about one-third less alcohol and, therefore, fewer calories than regular wine.

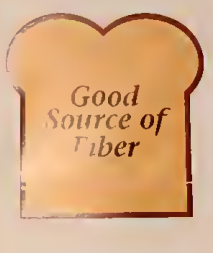
Choose a Diet with Plenty of Vegetables, Fruits, and Grain Products

Remember that the Food Guide Pyramid recommends that everyone should eat at least three servings of vegetables, two servings of fruits, and six servings of grain products each day.

Choose whole-grain products, such as whole wheat or cracked wheat breads, oatmeal, popcorn, whole cornmeal, or brown rice, often. They usually have more fiber than enriched products do. Don't go by dark color alone—not all dark breads are whole-grain. Sometimes the dark color comes from caramel coloring.

Check labels for claims to quickly find foods that are good sources of vitamins, minerals, or fiber:

—If the label has the words ***good source of*** or ***high in*** on the front, the food *must* contain at least 10% of the Daily Value for the nutrient mentioned per standard serving.



—If the label mentions the relationship of fruits, vegetables, and grains to heart disease or cancer, the food *must* be a good source of fiber or of vitamins A or C.

Total Carbohydrate 31g		10%
Dietary Fiber 0g		0%
Sugars 5g		
Protein 5g		
Vitamin A 4%	•	Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 15%	•	Iron 4%

Check for the amount of fiber, vitamins, and minerals a product has. Many vegetables, fruits, and grain products are good sources of these nutrients.

For More Information

USDA has published *The Food Guide Pyramid* (HG-252), a booklet that explains the Pyramid and its relationship to daily food choices, and *Dietary Guidelines and Your Diet* (HG-253), a set of pamphlets, each of which focuses on one of the Dietary Guidelines with practical tips on how to make changes in your diet. For information on ordering these publications, contact:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food and Consumer Service
Public Information Staff
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22302

USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline — Home economists and dietitians answer questions on safe handling and storage of meat and poultry products and provide information about the basic nutrition of meat and poultry products and the labeling of these items. Their telephone number is 1-800-535-4555 (toll-free outside Washington, DC, area); 202-720-3333 (Washington, DC, metropolitan area).

To ask for a free copy of *Read the Label, Set a Healthy Table: An Introduction to the New Food Label,* write to:

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
5600 Fishers Lane, HFE-88
Rockville, MD 20857

or call:

FDA's Food Labeling and Seafood Hotline, 1-800-FDA-4010

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